Tells the Facts and Names the Names

\$2.50

CounterPunch

January 16-31, 2004 — *Alexander Cockburn and Jeffrey St. Clair* — VOL. 11, NO. 2

Our Little Secrets

Sen. Facing-Both-Ways

By Alexander Cockburn & Jeffrey St Clair

Across the last thirty years it's hard to think of a Democratic candidate seemingly assured of his party's nomination who has had less of a baptism of sewage in the primaries than Senator John Kerry. Normally a front-runner can expect a roughing up from his sparring partners. But Dean drew all the fire, with Clark as prime diversion and Kucinich as the small white hope of the progressive crowd. So Kerry's very spotty record has been allowed to remain in decorous seclusion.

Most Democrats consider Kerry's record as irrelevant and view those with the bad taste to excavate it as active subverters of a righteous cause. But Karl Rove, Bush's political commissar, will not be so polite.

Kerry reminds us of no one so much as Mr Facing-Both-Ways, in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress.

He was elected to the US senate in 1984 and in his first term ventured onto some interesting and politically perilous terrain, with hearings into the scandal-ridden CIA-linked bank BCCI, and into the arms-for-cocaine contra scandals in Central America. In the end he lost his nerve and the hearings ultimately floundered to an inconclusive close. It was the last spark of vigor in a senatorial career of singular blandness and timidity.

Already in the 1980s this supposed Massachusetts liberal (always an oversold species) supported the Gramm-Rudman Act, a dagger in the heart of social programs. Kerry later

(**OLS** *continued on page 2*)

"We Will Destroy You, If Not in Death, Then in Life"

A Journey to Rafah

By JENNIFER LOEWENSTEIN

Editors' Foreword: We are devoting most of this issue to Jennifer Lowenstein's account of her recent trip to Rafah, the southernmost town in the Gaza Strip, up against the Egyptian border. It's a savage eyewitness- description of everything that's horrible in the Israeli occupation, everything that's ghastly in the lives of Palestinians, everything that's nauseating in US backing for what Israel inflicts on a captive people. -- AC/JSC

The Gaza Strip is far more than a prison. One need only spend time in Khan Yunis or Bureij, Jabalia or Nuseirat, Gaza City or Beit Hanoun to recognize the flaw in the prison analogy. In Gaza you are more than an inmate in a giant penitentiary. You are a walking human target, shadowed by hired killers who can destroy you and your surroundings at will. Your home belongs to bulldozers and dynamite, your cities and refugee camps to F-16s and helicopter gun ships. In Gaza your livelihood is diminished each day by an impoverishment that is as deliberate as it is merciless. There is neither escape from desperation nor refuge from terror. Nowhere is this more evident than in Rafah.

Rafah, a city with a population of about 120,000 (smaller than Ramallah, Nablus, Gaza City, and Hebron) has lost more people than any other city in the Occupied Palestinian Territories since the beginning of the second Intifada. It is the poorest of all Palestinian cities, and its Shaboura district is the poorest section of Rafah. There, whole families live together in one-room shacks made of corrugated iron with dirt floors and sheet metal, cardboard and tarpaulin roofs. Children run barefoot in the streets ill-clad and ill-fed. Nowhere in Palestine will one find conditions as miserable and destitute as they are in Rafah, approximately 80% of whose citizens are refugees sometimes two and three times over.

Since 29 September 2000 the Israeli army has killed 275 people in Rafah, more than three dozen of them since October 2003. Seventy-six of the dead have been children. It has destroyed a total of 1,759 homes, 430 of them since October 2003 displacing a total of 12,643 residents, 2,894 since October 2003. Unemployment is nearing 70 percent in Rafah, with a poverty rate of 83.4 percent as of the end of the third quarter of 2003.

Malnutrition affects a large number of Rafah's children as does Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. British MPs on a visit to Israel and the Occupied Territories have been quoted as saying, "Rates of malnutrition in Gaza and parts of the West Bank are as bad as anything one would find in sub-Saharan Africa." The Palestinian economy has all but collapsed. As in Rafah, overall unemployment rates are in the region of 60 to 70 percent.

* * *

Said Zoroub drives a white pick-up truck with the words "Rafah Municipality" painted on the driver's side in Arabic and English, a gift from the Norwegians. Less than an hour after my ar-

(**Rafah** *continued on page 3)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**OLS** *continued from page 1)*
renewed his commitment to the war on the poor by backing Clinton's onslaught on aid to poor mothers and their children and more recently still, voting for the Bush tax cuts. In the Clinton years Kerry positioned himself as one questioning the efficacy of affirmative action.

With the first Gulf war at the start of the 1990s Kerry changed positions so rapidly his staff grew dizzy with the effort of keeping up with their boss's gyrations. He finally voted against authorizing the war, but almost immediately issued a press release supporting the invasion. The 2003 war found Kerry voting with the Bush administration, only to cast himself in the early primary season as an opponent.

Kerry voted for Clinton's crime bill and for Clinton's Counter-Terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act which set the template for Bush's Patriot Act, which Kerry also voted for.

Kerry has indulged himself in some dutiful populist rhetoric against Big Oil, the drug companies, the HMOs and "the influence peddlers." Given his overall record, these burbles are not to be taken seriously as anything beyond campaign small-arms fire countering the occasional populist talk of John Edwards, his sometime rival on the primary trail.

The Kerry campaign has the enduring benefit of the vast fortune of Mrs Kerry, the former Teresa Heinz, tumultuous relict of the Portuguese empire. Mrs Kerry can use her money to run issue ads. Her interest in environmental issues has been mostly expressed through her Heinz Foundation whose board until very recently was adorned by that hero of free-market enviros, Ken Lay of Enron.

The Heinz Foundation put Ken Lay in charge of its global-warming initiative. When Enron went belly up, the Foundation stuck by their man: "Whatever troubles he had at Enron, Ken Lay had a good reputation in the environmental community for being a business man who was environmentally sensitive. When someone does wrong in one part of their life, it doesn't mean they can't do good in another part of their life."

It's the kind of sublime indifference to the messy realities of politics and life that is now inspiring Democrats to rally behind Kerry, under the vacant banner, Anybody But Bush.

Already Kerry has had to issue stentorian denials of fooling with an intern, identified as Alex Polier. No, it's not that sort of problem or a bid to prise the gay vote loose from Dean. Alex is a woman, who interned at AP and had enough contact with Kerry for her father to say the junior senator from Massachusetts is a "sleazeball", a view that seems to be held by some other women who have fallen, albeit briefly , under the spell of the senator's close-set eyes and jutting chin (surgically shortened). If Kerry's denial turns out to have holes in it, we'll be off and running along the Clinton Memorial Boulevard, with all the familiar diversions, detours and blind alleys.

From the cold-eyed CounterPunch perspective, Kerry seems a frail vessel for Democratic hopes. His recent senatorial record is devoid of achievement, and he exudes a kind of reverse charisma. Even when he's on camera in those endless debates we find ourselves looking over his shoulder in search of someone more interesting to listen to. Edwards would surely be a better bet. We have an affection for trial lawyers, who have a vocational disrespect for rich corporations. He's a better speaker and quick on his feet.

Mirroring the bankruptcy of their own ideas, liberal Democrats are reserving their most strenuous political energies for the task of trying to persuade Ralph Nader not to run. The Nation's editors printed an open letter urging him to bow out. It's hard to think of anything more likely to prompt Nader to stay in. To his austere puritan temperament the curses of the respectable political classes are pleasing reminders that he must be on the right track.

The left used to laud war shirkers and deprecate "heroism". Now most of them snigger at George Bush's positively Quaker-like refusal even to turn out for an Air Force physical in Alabama back in the early 70s and laud the medal-flaunting Kerry who insisted to Tim Russert three years ago on Meet the Press that yes, he had committed war crimes in Vietnam. The left used to revel in the naming of CIA operatives. Now they solemnly deplore the Bush White House's breach of security in outing Valerie Plame and call for stiffer penalties for such breaches in the future.

The left… there are some with backbone, but mostly they're content to rally behind the front runner of the hour, keep their mouths shut and order everyone else to do likewise.

Tommy Franks: 50,000 American Dead "OK"

By Stan Cox

Retired General Tommy Franks spoke at the annual Chamber of Commerce banquet here in Salina, Kansas in early February. Not being a Chamber-of-Commerce kind of guy, I wasn't in the audience. So I eagerly checked Salina Journal to learn whether General Franks, who led the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, had reflected on the human costs of those wars and weighed those costs against the results.

According to the Journal, the General "delivered a relaxed, folksy presentation, spiced with plenty of light-hearted and humorous stories." He warned those present that he doesn't like it when people walk out of his talks early, pointing out that Secret Service personnel were in the room. "It's not a big deal,' he said. 'If you try to leave when I'm talking, they'll just kill you.'"

Having established a rapport of sorts with the audience, Franks described how he answers reporters who want to know whether the number of American lives lost in Iraq has been too high: "If it costs 500, that's OK, or 5000, OK, or 50,000, that's OK with me. I, for one, will do whatever has to be done in order to be damn sure that our grandchildren and their grandchildren and their grandchildren and generations far from being born have the same rights as you and me." CP

Editors
Alexander Cockburn
Jeffrey St. Clair

Business
Becky Grant

Design
Deborah Thomas

Counselor
Ben Sonnenberg

Published twice monthly except August, 22 issues a year:
$40 individuals,
$100 institutions/supporters
$30 student/low-income
CounterPunch.
All rights reserved.
CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
1-800-840-3683 (phone)
counterpunch@counterpunch.org
www.counterpunch.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**RAFAH** *continued from page 4)*

rival in Rafah, Zoroub, the mayor, receives an urgent call on his cell phone. An Israeli bulldozer has struck a water main eight feet under the earth in the process of demolishing homes along the border between Rafah and Egypt. This has cut off the water supply to the western half of the city. From the passenger side of the municipality truck I get to survey the latest damage.

Outwardly Zoroub looks unperturbed, but his words belie the appearance. "We live each day here in a state of emergency." On either side of the road the homes and buildings on the streets of Rafah are dotted with bullet holes as if suffering from a contagious disease.

The nearer we get, the more ravaged are the buildings —crumbling from disrepair, caved in where tank shells and mortar fire have hit them during the night, their inhabitants make-shifting roofs, walls and doorways as needed. Lines of drying laundry hang outside the windows and political graffiti and posters of martyrs decorate the walls.

Poverty and ruin define the city landscape. The edge of town is a no-man's-land of rubble torn up and rolled over by the heavy tracks and claws of the armored vehicles that rule this terrain.

Puddles, stones and broken glass adorn the path alongside the homes on the city's perimeter that the Israeli army has blasted into gaping gray caverns too treacherous to stray into for long. More and more children appear from the alleyways of the neighborhood to our left following us curiously toward the end of the street. Men and women come out to greet the mayor as we pursue the sound of the tank in the distance that is flattening the earth beneath it, its guns pointed toward us.

A bulldozer is pushing up mounds of dirt and rubble behind it with a steady roar: more homes gone and no water in western Rafah until the Israeli authorities give clearance for the municipality to send out a repair crew that won't be shot on sight. A boy points to a hole in a wall from where I can snap pictures without being easily detected. From the same vantage point, children can watch the progress of the demolition. I have only taken two photos when the mayor tells me to "get away now, it's dangerous." It is Thursday afternoon, January 15, 2004.

There are tall IDF watchtowers everywhere along the Egyptian and Israeli borders with Rafah as well as between Rafah and the Gush Katif settlement bloc on the southeastern bend of the Mediterranean Sea. The beaches of Rafah, a short walk away for most of the city's residents, have been off limits to Rafahns since the beginning of the second Intifada denying them the only relief they have from the unbearable squalor of the Strip. Driving past the edge of the Tel as-Sultan district, the area exposed to the settlement watchtowers, the mayor picks up speed sensing our vulnerability. Many people have died along this stretch of road hit by bullets fired randomly by soldiers in the towers. The local boys nevertheless still attempt to use open spaces like this one as a soccer field on 'quiet' days.

Further on Zoroub points out an orphanage and new, pre-fab homes put up by UNRWA after the IDF incursions of October 2003 that left 1,780 people homeless, 15 civilians dead and dozens wounded. There are people still camped out in tents, and public buildings still converted into emergency shelters.

"In Gaza you are more than an inmate in a giant penitentiary. You are a walking human target, shadowed by hired killers who can destroy you and your surroundings at will."

Northwest of the town are the two fresh water wells rebuilt with emergency funds from Norway after the IDF destroyed them in January 2003. A caretaker shows us fresh bullet holes in the walls of his trailer-like quarters and in the big blue sign along the fence outside announcing the gift of the new wells. He recounts how bullets have of late been ricocheting off the sides of the wells themselves, advising us against standing there outside for long.

The day before, in East Jerusalem, a man named Roger from Save the Children told me not to go to Rafah, that it wasn't safe. "I was there just two weeks ago working on a water project. I was talking to a guy manning a water pump. He was wearing a helmet and a jacket identifying himself as a city worker but he was so exposed, you know —in full view of a watchtower. Two days later he was shot dead."

On the way back to the mayor's house we pass fields of multi-colored carnations and stop at a primitive flower factory. The flowers are cut and bound together for export to Holland —if the Israeli port authorities allow them to pass. If they don't get out within a few days they wilt and die even in the cold trucks. A man in the factory offers me a bouquet of red carnations. Driving back, Zoroub waves his hands in the direction of the field, "I wanted you to see something romantic in Rafah."

* * *

I left for Rafah on January 11, 2004, as part of a three-person pilot delegation to the city. We represented the Madison-Rafah Sister City Project, an organization founded in February 2003 to establish people-to-people ties between our two communities. Sistering projects are well known in Madison, Wisconsin–a Midwestern University town north of Chicago. Madison has official, City Council-approved sister cities with El Salvador, Nicaragua, East Timor, Cuba, Vietnam, and Lithuania among others.

It seemed time, some of us thought, to build ties with a city in Palestine though a vote making this official has not yet been taken. Although in our first year we had had a number of highly successful local events and were welcomed by many in the community here, we were unprepared for the obstacles we encountered trying to get into the Gaza Strip.

Since the deaths of Rachel Corrie, Thomas Hurndall, and James Miller at the hands of the Israeli military in Rafah last spring, entrance into the Gaza Strip has been increasingly difficult. What became clearer than ever to me as I struggled to get permission to enter the Strip this January was that internationals are being kept out for two key rea-

(**RAFAH** *continued on page 4)*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**RAFAH** *continued from page 3.)*

sons: to hide as much as possible what is taking place daily and to avoid any further "mishaps" —i.e., the killing or wounding of internationals that might draw unwanted publicity to the area again.

The Israeli military forces kill Palestinians nearly every day in cruel and horrible circumstances. Yet nearly 3000 Palestinian deaths have had no effect on the majority of Americans —most of whom have no idea what is happening in the Occupied Palestinian Territories or elsewhere in the Middle East— even though their government is directly responsible for them. When an international dies, however, especially a young American girl like Rachel Corrie whose purpose for being in Rafah was to engage in non-violent resistance, damage control becomes necessary —despite concerted attempts by some to portray Corrie as a "terrorist sympathizer".

On January 4, 2004 Israel issued a new series of restrictions designed to further isolate the Palestinian people and to prevent the situation in the territories from as much formal or informal international monitoring as possible. Persons wishing to enter Gaza "are required to fill out a form requesting entry and to submit it to the Foreign Relations Office in the Coordination & Liaison Administration in the Gaza Strip, situated at Erez crossing. These requests take a minimum of 5 business days to process, can be rejected at will, and often require repeated and frustrating attempts, as people we spoke to affirmed.

These restrictions follow other, equally unsettling policies such as the requirement issued last spring that all visitors to Gaza sign a waiver absolving Israel of all responsibility for death or injury caused by the Israeli military. International humanitarian aid organizations and foreign journalists have sometimes, but not always been, exempted. Nevertheless, the short-term effect of such policies has been to discourage all but the most determined from going to the Gaza Strip, and sometimes the West Bank. Their long-term effect could be far more devastating.

* * *

The night I got there the streets of Gaza City were flooded from torrential rains and waters gushing up from the useless, decaying gutters. Cars were stopped in the streets standing in half a foot of water and men were laying wooden planks from the curbs to help them cross shallower areas. The power had gone out in a good part of the city making it look more rundown than ever in the darkness. My taxi driver took a circuitous route around the worst areas and dropped me off at the Deira hotel hoping I would find a vacant room. In fact, the hotel was empty. The desk clerk explained that all the journalists planning to stay there that night had cancelled their reservations because Erez was closed. To his surprise I explained that I had just come through Erez. Now I had the beautiful villa-style hotel to myself. The next morning I left for Rafah passing the north-south checkpoint at Deir al-Balah with relative ease: we waited only 45 minutes before being allowed to proceed —unusual for a place where delays anywhere between 2 hours and four days are common.

Bullets flew at us like hailstones when we left Naila's home that first evening in Rafah. For two hours I'd sat together with Sumaiya, the mayor's wife, and her sisters and their children.

Nowhere in Palestine will one find conditions as miserable and destitute as they are in Rafah, approximately 80% of whose citizens are refugees sometimes two and three times over.

Some of the kids were roughhousing in the background when the power went out leaving us in darkness. The littlest boy, Karim, let out a shriek calling, "mama!" and someone went to look for a battery-operated lamp. Electricity, like water and phone lines, is never taken for granted.

We decided to leave when the lights came back on and Talal, the mayor's friend, came to pick us up, but we had to cram ourselves back into the doorway when bullets flew at us from the watchtower in the distance hitting the side of the building or shooting past us into the night.

I would never have left that doorway had I been alone, but for the others the routine for these episodes of indiscriminate firing was to pause for a moment to wait for quiet, then dart into the car and duck down below the windows while the driver sped away. Up the road,racing away from the same scene, two cars had collided. Their dejected drivers stood in the middle of the dark street surveying the damage.

Back at the mayor's home, I received a call from Laura Gordon, the last American ISM activist in Rafah. Would I come by the office and meet her friends? They were planning a demonstration for Friday. Had I heard that Tom Hurndall had died? Ten months in a coma and peace finally came. The martyr's posters had already been printed with his young face looking out at us. Now they would be plastered along the city walls next to all the others. The demonstrators would march up Keer Street the next morning to stand at the place where he'd been shot in the head attempting to pull two children out of the line of fire.

Tanks barrel down Keer Street when major invasions into Rafah begin. It is a wretched slum-like street that dead-ends in a large mound of earth, stone blocks and rubble across from the no-man's-land between it and the IDF's positions.

On Friday morning I stood on top of that mound gazing across the way at another fortress-like bunker harboring Israeli guards. I couldn't see them but I sensed their eyes on us.

The demonstrators, almost all children, wore bulls eye placards on their shirts and carried the banners, "Palestinians and Internationals are Targets for the Israeli Army." A young girl pointed to a small hole in the wall of the building at the end of Keer Street, the mark of the bullet, I was told, that ultimately killed Hurndall.

I have heard many say that the Gaza Strip is a prison with the sky for a ceiling. Its inhabitants live surrounded by electrified fences, motion censors,

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

An Israeli soldier said, "We are just little screws in a big machine". Would this be the justification years hence for the horrors of the occupation?

barbed wire and metal barriers except along the sea coast where Israeli gunboats patrol the shores. Israel prevents most Gazans from leaving the territory or traveling freely even between its overcrowded camps and towns since it is controlled by extensive checkpoints that can turn half-an-hour's travel into a four day journey. Its military can choose to close off sections of Gaza from all contact with the rest of the Strip whenever it pleases though residents of the 17 illegal settlements, which take up more than a quarter of this tiny area, can travel back and forth to Israel with ease on the Jewish-only roads.

* * *

When Israeli tanks came rolling through the streets of Rafah in October 2003 the western media reported they were looking for tunnels linking homes in Rafah to Egypt for the purpose of smuggling weapons. The Palestinian leadership was failing to "dismantle the terrorist infrastructure" and so it was up to Israel to do the job itself. We are supposed to accept unquestioningly that such tunnels and the trickle of weapons they deliver pose a serious threat to Israel's vast military arsenal, and that the process of searching for these tunnels necessarily involves the destruction of 2000 people's homes and all of their possessions.

To doubt this would jeopardize the logic of continued occupation and of the greater "war on terror" Americans and their Israeli allies must fight together. It could lead to the more likely conclusion that the level of death and destruction routine in Rafah are part of Israel's plan to clear —at whatever cost to the inhabitants— a wide area in between the Egypt-Rafah border in order to turn it into a closed military zone under direct Israeli control and to terrorize and intimidate the Palestinian population. Establishing a CMZ (closed military zone) will remove the last international boundary between Palestinian territory and a country other than Israel, guaranteeing that the Gaza Strip will become permanently quarantined. It will complete the destruction of the Gazan economy since trade with Egypt will, for all practical purposes, cease. It will advance the process of gradual, internal flight away from Gaza's border regions into the already overcrowded refugee camps and cities of the interior. Devastation and the implosion of an entire society will be accelerated with the United States' blessing.

Just after the October incursions, Amnesty International issued a statement labeling Israel's actions a war crime and calling for a halt to the extensive demolition of family homes. Two weeks of destruction, dispossession and death during which time Israeli forces found three tunnels and no weapons.

* * *

Heavy tank and machine gun fire blast the nights wide open in Rafah. For six hours straight I listen to the continual pounding of bullets and tank shells outside my window. Now and then an unidentifiable explosion interrupts the shooting, a silent pause creeps over the skies, and the routine begins again. But the silence above me is not absolute: in the distance on the ground I can hear the non-stop rumble of machines at work; bulldozers devouring the edges of the town.

On the morning of 17 January Arij Zoroub knocked on my door to find out if I was all right. She wanted to know if I'd been afraid. I told her I was angry. How could I explain the feeling of being transported away into a nightmare world where you expect the next blast to come through your wall —and that you almost wish for it so you can end your impotent seclusion; that in your mind you stand in the shadowy, cracked-open homes where the ragged partisans shoot back at the army and pray for them to hit their targets.

On the roof of the mayor's house, Arij points past the homes behind us to survey the night's damage. The familiar flattened landscape gapes back at me like a dead man's eyes. More homes gone and part of a mosque destroyed. Dozens more people displaced. Disproportionate force unleashed against pitiful guerrillas determined to fight back and to drag all of Rafah in with them if necessary. What difference will that make? Israel's message is clear: we will destroy you, if not in death then in life.

In the two weeks following my departure, at least 30 more homes vanished from Rafah and nearly 600 more people were displaced. Seven more people died, including an infant while two more men were the victims of Israel's "targeted assassinations" policy. Both were unarmed when they were executed. A photojournalist contact sent me photos from the latest violence.

These are the images that best summarize life in Rafah, the kinds of images that clutter my memory when I think back to my brief stay this January, even after the hours of working visits to the municipality, youth centers, women's organizations, the ministries of health and education, popular refugees' commit-

SUBSCRIPTION INFO

Enter/Renew Subscription here:

One year $40 Two yrs $70
($35 email only / $45 email/print)
One year institution/supporters $100
One year student/low income, $30
T-shirts, $17
Please send back issue(s)
_____ ($5/issue)

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Payment must accompany order, or dial 1-800-840-3683 and renew by credit card. Add $12.50 for Canadian and $17.50 for foreign subscriptions. If you want Counter-Punch emailed to you please supply your email address. Make checks payable to: **CounterPunch**
Business Office
PO Box 228, Petrolia, CA 95558

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

(**RAFAH** *continued from page 5*)
tees, and a rehabilitation center for the deaf; after days of note-taking and conversation about moving forward and building bridges between communities.

When I tried to leave Gaza through the Erez Crossing on the evening of January 17 Israeli soldiers ordered me to stop before I passed the last barricade. I was left waiting for more than two hours in the dark surrounded by concrete blocks. If I moved forward, I knew I could be shot. I shouted repeatedly at the soldiers in the Israeli bunker at the checkpoint to please let me through because I had a flight to catch.

My shouts were met with sarcastic remarks and threats, "Erez is closed, go back"and "we heard you the first time; you can be quiet now". Only after continuing to holler that I was an American citizen and needed to leave was I finally instructed to proceed through the electronic security gate.

At the window of the bunker, a helmeted young soldier grabbed my passport and stamped it huffily saying that he hadn't been able to let me through before he'd gotten clearance from a higher authority. A voice behind him echoed guiltily, "We are just little screws in a big machine". Would this be the justification years hence for the horrors of the Israeli occupation?

And now a necessary afterword. Much has been made of the recent development that Ariel Sharon is planning to evacuate the 17 Jewish settlements in Gaza.

Actually there are 23 settlements, as Amira Hass pointed out in a marvelous article in Ha'aretz on February 13. What Sharon said was, "I have given an order to plan for the evacuation of 17 settlements in the Gaza Strip." An order to *plan* for the evacuation is not the same as an order to evacuate, which is yet to be given.

Nonetheless, many have known for years that Israel does not 'need' Gaza and that giving up the settlements there could provide some strategic leverage for Israel, keen to annex more Palestinian land in the West Bank for its settlements there with Washington's approval. Indeed, some say that Sharon expects the West Bank in return for 'giving up' the Gaza Strip.

Sharon's move is also, in all likelihood, a ploy to look conciliatory during his next visit to Washington, to refocus domestic attention on the Palestinian crisis and away from the scandals now rocking Sharon's government, and possibly an attempt to explore a unity government with Labor. It may also be another attempt to divide any remaining Palestinian leadership within the enclaves that remain.

The likelihood of the circumstances in Gaza being made easier for its Palestinian inhabitants even with the evacuation of all Jewish settlements is slim based on the extent to which Gaza is cordoned off from Israel and Egypt and under heavy IDF military control. In fact, the chances are considerable that the social and economic circumstances in Gaza will continue to worsen and that extremism within the political factions will increase. CP

The likelihood of the circumstances in Gaza being made easier for its Palestinian inhabitants even with the evacuation of all Jewish settlements is slim based on the extent to which Gaza is cordoned off from Israel and Egypt and under heavy IDF military control.

Jennifer Loewenstein is a freelance journalist and human rights activist. She worked at the Mezan Center for Human Rights in Gaza City, Gaza for 5 months in 2002. In February 2003 Jennifer founded the Madison-Rafah Sister City Project and visited Rafah in January 2004 for its first delegation to the city. She teaches at the University of Wisconsin - Madison.

CounterPunch
PO Box 228
Petrolia, CA 95558
Wear a CP Shirt!
To Order Call: 1-800-840-3683

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED